



In choosing to discuss the subject of ritual, I feel as one who should attempt to pull a long blue thread from an intricate and many-coloured tapestry. For the subject of ritual is closely interwoven with every other subject of religion, and the subject of religion is interwoven with the whole of life.

Even to say this is to say something of importance on the subject; for there has been an increasing tendency over the last four hundred years to regard ritual as something external to the real matter of religion - something which has been tacked on and which can, without difficulty, be altered or removed.

The reason for this is not difficult to understand, and in understanding it, we will provide ourselves with a key to the whole phenomenon of masculist religion. It can be expressed in the following words: "If we are to have a religion, it must be a sensible system of rational propositions which do not interfere with the rationality of the world. If there is a God, She must remain neatly in Her heaven - there must be no point at which She makes real contact with the real world."

But ritual is precisely such a point. It is an intersection between time and Eternity; between space and the Infinite. A meeting-place of cosmos and Creatrix. As malekind became more and more pleased with the sight of his own reflection in the shallow pool of his own rationalism, he became less and less able to understand this absolute contact with the absolutely Other.

There is a passage in The First Sex which is often quoted by Madrians and frequently greeted with surprise:

"When man first resolved to exalt the peculiarities of his own sex, muscularity and spiritual immaturity, he adopted the policy that reality meant tangibility and that what could not be seen or touched did not exist... by crushing every manifestation of supersensory or extrasensory truth and worshipping only sensate matter, man made himself a mere biological organism and denied himself the divine ray that once upon a time woman had revealed to him."

"But surely," it is said, "surely all the great masculist religions are a living contradiction of this". But to say this is to misunderstand the origin of masculist religion and society. It did not appear one morning, all complete and shining in the dew. It was the result of a long slow decline from the highest point of Madrian-matriarchal civilisation. Certainly patriarchy came into being through sudden and violent revolutions, but these could take place only when the Matriarchates had become sufficiently decadent to allow them to. Neither did the decline finish with the patriarchal revolution. It goes on to this day.

Religion is the fundamental experience of humanity. If we could completely lose it, we would cease to be truly human. The whole drift of patriarchy is away from religion; but it has never been lost. The essential spiritual deposit inherited from matriarchal Madrianism has become more and more diluted as the patriarchal religions have 'progressed'; but it is only to the extent that they retain something of that deposit that they can continue to be called religions at all.

The development of patriarchal religion and culture is not constant. Like the forces of nature, it ebbs and flows. It goes round in circles - or rather, it goes round in a spiral, for every time we arrive back at the same point, we are on a lower level. This decline takes two forms which are outwardly different, but inwardly are identical: the masculinization of religion, and the drift towards materialism and eventual atheism.

In the beginning the one Goddess stood alone. She is One and She is Three. This is the fundamental fact of all religion. Her life, Her death, Her resurrection: these are the fundamental Mysteries of all religion. Here, in stark simplicity, in utter purity is the one Truth which lies behind all later religious formulations. The earliest deviations from this Truth may seem harmless enough; they involved usually the introduction of a son or consort of the Goddess, always in a very modest and unassuming capacity.

Now the danger, and the destructive quality of these deviations was not their religious impurity. There is no innate tendency in the human soul to worship a male god; it is a highly artificial and unnatural form of worship which only comes about when all avenues to the Mother have been blocked off by force or by social conditioning. Even then, it is only a blind and desperate way of striving towards Her. Therefore, there was no danger of the spontaneous growth of an idolatrous cult of the son or consort. Except in the most arid spiritual climate, the son is not a religious motif.

And it is precisely in this that the real danger lay. It is only into a religion that is becoming ossified that one can introduce an image totally devoid of real religious content. Further, the introduction of such images accelerates the ossification and creates a downward spiral; for those who have a genuine religious sensitivity and might have reformed the structure find themselves confused and alienated by the harsh and jarring notes which have become a part of the Faith. These tender and delicate souls will be among the first to be driven into a secular aestheticism or a private and uncommunicative mysticism, or any of a hundred other refuges. Increasingly, religion will pass from the hands of the religious into the hands of the religiose. It will become a 'civic religion'. It will represent 'social realities' rather than Absolute Reality.

In the Dark Ages which followed upon the fall of the Roman Empire, Christianity very nearly perished altogether; and when the great Christian revival came at the dawn of the mediaeval period, it was spearheaded not by the cross of 'Christ', but by the holy image of the one Goddess, and the name of Mary. Elizabeth Gould Davis writes:

"The church seemed doomed to failure, destined to go down to bloody death amidst the bleeding corpses of its victims, when the people discovered Mary. And only when Mary, against the stern decrees of the church, was dug out of the oblivion to which Constantine had consigned her and became identified with the Great Goddess was Christianity finally tolerated by the people."

From this point, Christianity divided into a worldly and totalitarian civic religion on the one hand, and on the other, a vast popular devotion to our Lady, under the name of Mary and of certain other saints (such as the Irish St. Brigit or St. Bride, under whose name continued the Celtic cult of the Goddess Brighde).

The final turn of the spiral began with the Protestant reformation. Again, a rigorous return to the cult of the Death and Resurrection, and an equally rigorous attempt to abolish the worship of Mary and the saints. But Protestantism was more than this: it was an attempt to adapt religion to the urbanism and hyper-rationalism of the modern period. Max Weber argued that Protestantism and the social spirit it engendered was the cause of industrial capitalism; others have suggested that incipient industrial capitalism and the social spirit ^{was the cause of Protestantism} it engendered. But nobody can deny that Protestantism goes hand in hand with urbanism, industrialism and materialism. This did not affect only the Protestant churches. At the Council of Trent, soon after the Reformation the Christian-"Catholic" church significantly Protestantised itself, and has continued the process

ever since, following always a few steps behind the professing Protestant denominations (the Second Vatican Council has recently come close to completing the process).

This is the final turn of the spiral, for the decline begins to approach its nadir. The religious movement cannot continue, but moves steadily toward materialism, atheism and alienation. The patriarchal religions, living on the borrowed spiritual resources of the ancient Matriarchal faith have finally run dry. Humanity flounders without hope or direction, clutching at straws. The old religions can do nothing to help. Either we will return to the ancient springs of the one fundamental Truth, or the Atomic Age will destroy us spiritually and probably physically as well. Either we will have a revival of the one ancient and (literally) catholic faith of the one Goddess, or we will have nothing.

Now if this seems to have led us a long way from the subject of ritual, I can only say two things in my defence: firstly, that I feel it was necessary, and secondly, that it has at least led us right back to the subject of ritual. For if there was one thing which characterised the final (or Protestant) phase of patriarchal religion more than any other, it was the extreme dislike and misunderstanding of ritual which was mentioned at the beginning of this article. And the two reasons for this were the rationalism and materialism that had been developing ever since the decline of the great matriarchal civilisations.

The rationalist, even if she believes in a religion, must believe that its essence is a series of rational propositions, and not a series of seemingly irrational acts. The person who is on the road to materialism can believe that her body is nourished by a little bread and wine, but she cannot believe that her soul is nourished by a Sacrament, even if she professes to believe that she has a soul.

This, of course, is perfectly illogical. If one has decided, for emotional or cultural reasons, to give one's faith to the belief that there can be nothing beyond the material, then one is logically justified in believing that there can be no such thing as a supernatural event. We may quarrel about the first belief, and ask where it came from, but we cannot deny that the second belief came by a process of strict logic from the first. But if, on the other hand, one believes in the supernatural, and indeed in the Divine, then one cannot expect to tame Her - one cannot start making rules to circumscribe the areas in which She may manifest Herself. One cannot keep Her out of the living room. It may embarrass the scientists, or it may embarrass us in front of the scientists, but there it is. If there is a Power above and beyond the 'natural' world, we must accept that She is able to invade the world and to act upon the world. She will give us miracles and She will give us Sacraments.

Now there is one very typical objection to this which goes as follows: "But is not ritual a rule governing the manifestation of the Divine? Is it not an act by which you conjure up the Goddess?" It is a frequent objection and one which reveals a reasonable mind. But it also reveals a mind which knows nothing of the nature of ritual and has never participated fully in a real Rite of the Goddess. Anyone who has knelt in Her Presence at any Rite will know that ritual is not an act by which we conjure up the Goddess; it is an act by which She conjures up us. Every religion which understands the nature of ritual teaches that it is not just a Rite, but a duty. It is not just a means by which we may come to the Divine, but a means by which we must come to Her. The recurring events of the month and of the year echo the call of the Mother, and we who are Her children obey it.

Equally, every religion which understands the nature of ritual teaches that it is not a thing invented by mankind for the sake of the Goddess, but a thing instituted by the Goddess

for the sake of maidkind. Ritual is not artificial: it grows naturally (or rather supernaturally) wherever there is a genuine worship of the Goddess. Anyone who has truly experienced a ritual knows that it has an independent and indescribable power, far beyond anything which can be explained by the actions and words of the Rite itself. This is not to say that there cannot be artificial rituals. Every Government ceremony is an artificial ritual, so, for the most part, are the rites of the masculinist civic religions. But an artificial ritual is as much an anomaly as an artificial tree, and about as much use. When one begins to see ritual as a purely human creation which has no spiritual purpose beyond being a "commemoration" or a "communal expression of faith", then the most honourable thing to do is what the most extreme Protestants did: abolish it altogether.

But the first patriarchs did not see ritual as a human creation which could be altered or modified at will. They altered the ancient Myths, they destroyed the ancient temples, they made idols to replace the image of the Goddess; but they dared not tamper with the rituals. They knew that these were their last contact with the divine. Sometimes, working on the masculinist-materialist principle of 'bigger is better', they replaced the simple Sacrifice of a cake or flower with vast and bloody holocausts, but even this was rare and did not last. All the rites which have survived into the present era are taken from the Rites of the Goddess. If the patriarchs wanted a ritual of initiation and rebirth, they must use the sprinkling of water used by the Babylonian matriarchs in the name of Ishtar. If they wanted a sign of blessing, they must adopt the three-fingered blessing of the Phrygian Madrians, and named after the Amazon princess Myrine. If they wanted a rite of Communion, they must copy the bread-and-wine Communion which was celebrated at Eleusis in honour of Demeter.

Christians like Clement of Alexandria spread obscene slanders

about the Eleusinian Mysteries. Christians from Paul onwards loathed even the most mildly independent woman, and would have shuddered at the thought of a conquering Amazon princess. But they dared not change the ritual acts.

In the early years of patriarchy, priests wore the robes of a priestess and false breasts, for they knew that a religious rite could only be celebrated by a woman. To this very day, the priests of ritualist religions wear flowing robes, and in the Roman "Catholic" church, they are not allowed to grow beards.

The patriarchs did not do these things because they found them attractive, or because they could not devise for themselves any better "expression of communal faith". They did them because they knew that ritual was real; and they were still close enough to the true heart of religion to realize that the only genuinely efficacious rituals are the Rites of the Goddess.

Inevitably, these rituals became more and more debased as patriarchy progressed; but the completely negative attitude toward them which has developed over the last few centuries is the surest sign that we have reached the last turn of the spiral: that we are rapidly approaching the point at which we must either make a radical change of direction or decline into spiritual oblivion.

The decline of ritual is a symptom of the general spiritual decline of humanity. But in a sense, it is also a cause of it, for all aspects of life and religion are closely interlinked, and a decline in any one will create decline in the others, which will in turn react back upon the first, creating a vicious cycle. But positive developments can also have the same cyclical effect; and the way in which we can bring about the necessary reversal of spiritual direction is by creating and nurturing this inter-reacting process of positive development, first in ourselves, and then in an increasing number of others who are becoming ready to turn to the Goddess. It is like kindling a fire. First we light one twig, and then another, trying to make the tiny flickering

flames spread and combine and strengthen one another, sheltering them from the winds of the world that could so easily destroy them; often despairing of the possibility that they shall not be extinguished as soon as our own breath stops blowing on the dying embers; often fearing lest our own tears should put them out. But slowly the fire grows, the twigs become bigger, and soon we are bringing logs and branches to feed the leaping flames. The little pile of glowing twigs becomes an all-consuming pyre which no force can withstand, lighting and warming the cold, dead world of the expiring patriarchy, and gathering up those who stand closest into the burning ecstasy of the Goddess.

Now ritual is one of the first and most important areas - perhaps the most important area - in which we can begin the upward spiral. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that ritual provides a supernatural time-structure for our lives. By regular participation in ritual, we are delivered from the slavery of the lineal time of masculist-materialist culture. This time is endless in two senses; that it has no termination, and that it has no end in the sense of an aim or object or consummation. At its best it is idealised in the vaguely optimistic, but essentially aimless cultural motifs of 'progress' and 'evolution'; in reality it is epitomised by the unending tedium of the conveyor belt.

The practice of ritual displaces this time-structure. Not only is the climax of a Rite a literal transcendence of time, but the regular experience of ritual structures the life of the psyche around the recurring events of the lunar and seasonal cycles; which are themselves the symbolic reflections of the Divine Events - the fundamental Mysteries of existence. The regular practice of ritual continually deepens the spiritual apprehension of the Timeless as it is reflected in the progression of time. Masculist-materialist time is a line attempting to extend itself into infinity. Madrian or ritual time is a circle attempting to transform itself into the perfect sphere of Eternity.

And just as the masculinist time-conception has provided late-masculinist culture with the central element of its characteristic view of the world: progressivism or evolutionism; so the Madrian or ritual time-structure, as it grows within us, will give rise to a qualitatively different and characteristically feminist world-outlook.

Another importance of ritual, which is closely related to this, is that it has its greatest effect on an unconscious level. This is important because, whether we like it or not, most of us have been so deeply indoctrinated by patriarchal culture that much of the time we are either unconsciously operating on its inbuilt assumptions, or (which is almost as bad) reacting directly against them. The process of ritual experience slowly permeates the deepest levels of our whole being in a way that no rational formulation could ever achieve, so that even when the conscious mind cannot find its way through the tangled maze of patriarchal sophistry, the deeper levels of thought are able to cut a clear path to the Mother.

Behind both these facts lies a third which is greater than either. It is the simple fact that ritual is. It works. It is real. It was instituted by our Mother in the beginning, and when we can be sure of nothing else, we can be sure of this. Some modern sects and cults have wanted to do away with 'stuffy rituals', stressing the importance of a simple, direct personal contact with Deity. In a way, they were right. The rituals to which they referred were, for the most part artificial rites; and one can never say too much about the glories of a simple direct communion with the Divine. But one of the things that one should not forget to say is that it will not always be there. Everyone, however deep her faith, knows that there come times when we feel a million miles away from the Goddess. We have not ceased to love Her; we do not believe that She has ceased to love us; but somehow we feel a complete lack of contact, we feel as though a great gulf had opened up between ourselves and She.

But however dissatisfied we may feel with our prayers, and even when we feel repelled by our personal devotions (as may occasionally happen even to the most spiritual), we can always be sure when we participate in a Rite of the Goddess that She is there, and that at some level of our being, Her grace flows within us. Not everybody experiences Divine rapture at Sacrifice, and nobody does on every occasion: but we can always be certain of the Rite. The mind may be unable to concentrate upon Her for a moment; the heart may lack all faith, but the soul has come before Her altar, and it is enough. She will receive us in the Rite, for She has promised; and we will know that She has received us, for we cannot doubt Her sacred vow. We may fail Her, but She will never fail us.